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Oral History Interview

with

~~Edwin B.~~ EDWARD G. Lansdale

July 11, 1970
Alexandria, Virginia

By Dennis J. O'Brien

For the John F. Kennedy Library

O'BRIEN: I think a logical place to begin in anything like this is just simply with the question, when did you first meet President Kennedy, or Senator Kennedy, if you met him before he was President?

LANSDALE: I don't recall meeting him before he was President. The first meeting, I believe, was ~~I believe,~~ the first Saturday following the inauguration, whatever date that was. I was called into a meeting in the White House by [Robert S.] McNamara. It was a meeting on, actually, on a report that I had written for [Dwight D.] Eisenhower. It was sort of a I'm not sure

that it was an NSC [National Security Council] meeting, but it was comparable to that with the personnel that were attending. There were several secretaries: Defense, State, and his National Security people were there.

O'BRIEN: Did you have much contact with McNamara and [Roswell L.] Gilpatric, members of the incoming administration, before they actually assumed office?

LANSDALE: Just before, that is, a day or so before. I'd been in Vietnam for a brief visit and got back just before the inaugural, maybe two or three days, and at that time both McNamara and Gilpatric were in Defense getting briefed for their new jobs. I met them at that time. The outgoing deputy secretary of defense asked me to start working with Gilpatric, and so I got to know Gilpatric rather than McNamara.

O'BRIEN: This is [James H.] Douglas.

LANSDALE: Douglas, Jim Douglas. ~~(James H. Douglas)~~

O'BRIEN: How is Douglas to work with, while you're with him? Is he a pretty sympathetic person?

LANSDALE: Yes, very much so, very much so. He was the one, actually, who wrote the orders and back-

stopped my visit to Vietnam, and back-stopped it principally so that I could take a look at some of the political factors as well as economic, military, and psychological, and everything else. This, frankly, took a consi[illegible]tanding on his part that because my views weren't always popular in other parts of the government. I gathered that there was some opposition to my going out, and he insisted on it.

O'BRIEN: I'd like to come back to that. I wonder if we could go on to talk about one of the major problems, which is Cuba. When is the first time that you hear about the Bay of Pigs invasion? not the Bay of Pigs, but the plans?

LANSDALE: Sometime in the fall of ~~sixty~~ '60. I think ~~that~~ I heard of it about the first time that it was brought up to the ~~inter~~ inner policy group of the Eisenhower administration. I was the Deputy Assistant to the Secretary of Defense, at the time, for Special Operations and used to accompany the Deputy Secretary, who was a member of the ~~inter~~ inner policy group, to most of

the meetings that th... had. When Allen Dulles (Allen W. Dulles) ...st raised the notion to the Senate group. I was present at the meeting as an Assist...

O'BRIEN: What is the thinking about it at that time? What kind of operation is ... it basically a guerilla operation at this point?

LANSDALE: Initially it was. Initially it was very different than the way it turned out. It was based on a premise that many people in Cuba were very unhappy with the Castro administration and the way it was turning away from the initial revolutionary objectives and the capture of the revolutionary movement by the Communist Party which surprised many of the supporters of Castro as a guerilla and as a revolutionary action. So the thought was to back a number of Cubans who either had been supporters of Castro or were very unhappy, were still resident in Cuba, and to cause some overturn at the time. The change of plan towards the Bay of Pigs thing evolved fairly fragilely and apparently there was a planning group and CIA [Central

Intelligence Agency] who were working on this initial plan who started thinking in military invasion terms. I suspect that they were doing that because some of the Cuban military and military types, that is, very militant, kr[illegible]as, were coming out of Cuba as refugees, and they suddenly saw a windfall of manpower and started thinking in other terms of use of them. But ~~this change was,~~ the changed plan towards the Bay of Pigs thing, the way it was going, was well under way in the inner circle thinking of CIA by December of '60, and very definitely so.

O'BRIEN: Who were some of the inner circle people at this point, do you recall? ~~(Pierre E.) Salinger, of course.~~

LANSDALE: Let's see, ~~uh,~~ Oh golly. O'BRIEN: I imagine [Richard M.] Bissell was. . . . LANSDALE: Dick Bissell ~~(Richard M. Bissell)~~ was the overall chief of the group.

O'BRIEN: Tracy Barnes, was he in it at that time?

LANSDALE: Tracy was an assistant to him, but how far Tracy actually went in the detailed ~~actual~~ planning or anything. . . . I have my doubts that he was. . . .

O'BRIEN: How about Broe, William Broe? ~~[William V. Broe]~~

LANSDALE: He was one of a planning group who were planning the operation, but he wasn't ~~a~~ the chief, and I can't recall the guy's name offhand.

O'BRIEN: Oh well, maybe when you get the transcript back; you can.

LANSDALE: Maybe so.

O'BRIEN: How about ~~from~~ some of the other places [illegible] days? [illegible] C.) Mann, I sup[illegible]

LANSDALE: Yes, but initially it was all CIA. They borrowed some military personnel to help with the planning ~~earlier,~~ early on, but they were people who had been attached to CIA for temporary duty on other matters, and they hadn't come in initially for this specific planning. In December, when the planning had obviously started coming in with a beach landing and so on, the way it turned out, I urged at that point to get military planning in on the thing. I was worrying about it.

As a matter of fact, Allen Dulles brought his planners to a policy meeting, a policy group meeting, and they were explaining the concept. ~~and~~ My questioning was such that Allen Dulles pleaded with me not to spoil the plan at an early

stage. I remember General [Lyman L.] Lemnitzer was sitting in the meeting. He was chairman of the JCS [Joint Chiefs of Staff] at the time and he backed up my urging them to get some military planning in on that. After th[illegible]ent among our pol[illegible]ple of that, and then the JCS set up a special section to plan along with the Central Intelligence Agency on that. And who the hell headed that?

O'BRIEN: This is yet in the Eisenhower administration.

LANSDALE: This is all back in 1960. This was still in the early planning stages. This was before training or anything like that was put forward. When the JCS got into the act, I asked to be disassociated with the project. I was rather critical of the concept, and it was just too clumsy and overt, and a poor planned feeling.

O'BRIEN: Alot of people have knowledge of this by the end of the Eisenhower administration?

LANSDALE: I don't know how widespread it was. There were key executives that were knowledgeable, there was a small group in the JCS that was

knowledgeable, and there was a planning group at CIA, but I don't think it went beyond that. I don't know how far it was known, but I thought it was rather closely held.

O'BRIEN: You don't know whether the presidential candidates [illegible] at all, do you?

LANSDALE: Ye[illegible]ey were. There was a very definite -- no, wait a minute. The candidates, no, I don't think they were. As a matter of fact, it was still in a rather nebulous stage ~~of~~ in this shifting over in ~~early~~ November. I think somebody told me, if I recall correctly, that the concept was in the form of a memo in CIA about August, so this would be well after the candidates had been nominated and so on. I imagine that it was just held ~~by~~ to two or three people inside the CIA at the time. ~~At least,~~ the rest of us certainly didn't know it. I forget exactly when I first heard it, but it would be possibly October, but it might have even been November by the time I heard about it. As I say, I heard about it when it was surfaced with the inner circle of our administration executives.

O'BRIEN: Well, I suppose you had some conversations with Dulles and with Bissell and some of these people about it.

LANSDALE: Yes.

O'BRIEN: What's their feeling? You already discussed D[illegible] asking you to sort of hold your criticism. . .

LANSDALE: Well, Bissell definitely felt the same way. Bissell was a very hard working, intense person, almost high strung type of an individual. He became rather impatient with my questioning of the changed concept when it took place. I thought that initially if they had the correct personnel and they had a correct reading of dissent inside of Cuba, that was a fair chance to do something. My only concern at the time was: did CIA have Americans who could work with such a situation? I just didn't know of any, but I was assured that yes, there were such Americans. But I'm not certain that there were.

O'BRIEN: Did you question the kind of intelligence that was coming out about Cuba and the expected reaction of Cubans to an invasion and the

reaction to Castro in general?

LANSDALE: Just in very general terms. I didn't have enough concrete and specific information myself that was separate from theirs. Most of the intelligence take at the time, available inside the U.S. government, was pretty colored with this dissatisfaction and statements of it. So I had no real way of determining the accuracy or inaccuracy of it. Some of the adjectives used in describing this in briefings to us alerted me a little bit. It just sounded like too much of a sales job on a viewpoint. I'd question that, whether that was an accurate thing, so this is about as far as I went.

O'BRIEN: How did a guy like Douglas react? Do you recall?

LANSDALE: Well, he approved of the plan, so he and the others at the policy level approved of going ahead with it and developing it. I was his advisor on this thing--that was my staff job--and I told him to be certain to get the JCS to give it a real hard scrutiny and to come

up with details of whether it could succeed or not. That was my last advisory role with him. I was taken off advising on the project after that, actually by my own request because I was apparently causing too much trouble and was [illegible] works of progress.

O'BRIEN: What's the reaction of the Joint Chiefs, people like Lemnitzer, towards this? Is there an institutional rivalry or bureaucratic rivalry here in their minds?

LANSDALE: Somewhat, somewhat. It was a little bit as though, well, somebody's going to be playing Boy Scouts, so this isn't really rivalry. They had a difficult time taking this really seriously. Later, I know, when the JCS got in and helped on the actual planning of this, they became much more serious on it because they had a share of it.

O'BRIEN: Well, do you get involved in the informing of McNamara and Gilpatric about this? Do you get any way of sensing what their reactions are on first being informed?

LANSDALE: No. They had apparently known by the time I

met them, I didn't get in on that. The one person who ~~has~~ a view of their reactions would probably be Bill Bundy, ~~(William P. Bundy)~~ who I know at the time was discussing this with them.

O'BRIEN: Did you have [illegible] Bundy and his [illegible] at that point?

LANSDALE: Yes. This was a little out of Bundy's field. He was always trying to figure out what the chances were, the percentages of win or loss. He was low, ~~and~~ I hadn't known the final plan on this thing, and Bundy did, and he asked me what I thought. I told him, well, if the JCS guarantees something, you can ~~take~~ it 10 percent lower than that and go along with it. I'm not sure that they know a clandestine operation, but they'd sure know a military landing, whether it would succeed or not. Given some of the unknowns in this thing, ~~I say that~~ by 10 percent and go along with the figure." Well, apparently they had given it a high chance of success, the JCS had, because Bundy said, "Well, you mean it's going to succeed then?" I said, "Well, I

don't know." I gathered that he felt it would succeed.

O'BRIEN: Well then you are pretty much out of touch with it until it actually comes off. You didn't get in to any of the changes in the plans there at all.

LANSDALE: No. I left at around the first of December '60. I really didn't follow it from then on.

O'BRIEN: Did anyone come to you from the Agency or from State or from the White House as far as that goes and attempt to seek an independent judgement on your part or your

LANSDALE: No.

O'BRIEN: How about the noise level on this? Obviously you're out of it, but is there much talk about it that is sort of filtering down in Defense and the people that are around you that really have no need to know and direct involvement?

LANSDALE: I wasn't aware of it. There might have been, but I have no knowledge of that.

O'BRIEN: When the thing the operation actually begins and the landing has taken place, do you come

into it again at that point at any time?

LANSDALE: No.

O'BRIEN: You do become involved in Cuban affairs at a later time.

LANSDALE: Later, yes.

O'BRIEN: When do you [illegible] you have anything [illegible] with the [Maxwell] Taylor committee, which makes the inquiry about it?

LANSDALE: I met with them once, and they weren't interested with the Bay of Pigs. They were interested in the decision-making process, in the making of policy, and asked me if I had any ideas on how better the president could be served in the policy decisions and arriving at them. The thing was, right at that moment, McNamara had previously asked me for the same thing, and I had come up with a proposal for him which he put to Kennedy. I just told them, I had some ideas but I had given them to somebody else, and I was skeptical of the boss anyhow. This was on putting together task forces. The Kennedy administration had eliminated a bureaucratic boondoggling thing

in-- what the hell was that called?

O'BRIEN: OCB? [Operations Coordinating Board].

LANSDALE: Yes, the OCB. I pointed out that the one good thing about it was that the principals met for lunch. I said the rest of it's for the birds, but to get men in government who are talking to [illegible] who are held responsible by him for managing men, money, and material and so on, who can understand the problem well enough around the lunch table to have one secretary or deputy secretary or under secretary say, "Well, we'll take care of that," and so on, was a good way of doing business. Then with the president's own National Security man sitting in on it, going back and telling him this is going to happen for these reasons, why, it was a good control mechanism.

So essentially all I told the Taylor people and told McNamara in my paper was that this function had been eliminated, along with cutting out a lot of dead wood, and there was some live wood in it, and how about restoring the live wood? This essentially was what my proposition was with the task force,

of getting the people most concerned with something who could operate for the president, and having them get together and help form the policy, get the president's approval, and they were the same ones who could st[illegible] it immediately.

[illegible] not to create another big bureaucratic thing. And of course, after they first tried this, it rapidly started becoming a big bureaucratic thing. The task forces that were later set up were just big staffs sitting in different buildings. It was almost like OCB again, not quite, but it got out of hand. Anytime you try to change the government around it seems to come right back in form again and close ranks on it. But that was all I did with the Taylor group. Incidentally, in that inquiry into the Cuban bit was the first time that I met [Robert F.] Bobby Kennedy. For some reason or other I didn't connect him personally with the pictures of him and so on, on TV and I wondered what the youngster was doing sitting in the meeting

talking so much.

O'BRIEN: Was he pretty tough?

LANSDALE: Well, he wasn't tough. He was the most interested of anyone in the room there of what I would say on things and plague me with many questions.

O'BRIEN: How were his questions? Was he fairly naive about the problems?

LANSDALE: No, this was on ~~problems~~ questions of how the government would operate at a decision level, and they weren't naive at all. He had a very good understanding. He was very much concerned about his brother's getting good service in the way of information and full details and ~~of~~ alternatives and so on, on a policy decision.

O'BRIEN: Well, ~~if you, you know,~~ in that period right after the Bay of Pigs--of course you had a lot of contacts and friendships in other places outside the Pentagon.

LANSDALE: Yes.

O'BRIEN: What kind of an impact does ~~did~~ the Bay of Pigs have, let's say over in the Agency, and State Department, and in Defense, and in the White House?

LANSDALE: It was a traumatic experience at top levels throughout the government. I think it affected President Kennedy more than any other single thing. It was almost a taboo subject if you were going in to do business and to get an approval on something you never even hinted Cuba or the Cuban affair. It was such an intense sore subject among all of these people. I felt that almost all of the key executives in the administration must have dreamt about it at night or something, and during the daytime working hours they just didn't want to even contemplate it. And yet they were honest enough people that they knew they had to face up and look at it and would do so, but it was an extremely emotional subject with them, very much so.

O'BRIEN: Well, in terms of the Agency, there's a number of programs and, of course, involvements in operations that they have. Do you see any shift in these, any attempt on the part of the Defense Department to move into some of these areas which they felt were traditionally theirs

rather than the Agency. I guess what I'm trying to say is, can you see any decline in the Agency influence in the Agency in decisions?

LANSDALE: Yes, I think so. I'm not certain that it was the military as such. It might have been the [illegible] like McNamara personally [illegible] encouragement of some of the military who were somewhat interested but wouldn't really have expressed the interest unless they were directly asked, and there always had been some feeling of unease, I think would be the best word to describe it, among the military about any clandestine operations. They felt that once it got over into guerrilla type of operations or anything that would involve a military subject, that it would be far better to let the military establishment of the U.S. handle it. But that would be sort of a dinner-cotail party type of a gambit on their part rather than sitting and planning and so on of "We must grab some of this," Even though among themselves they talked that way. They didn't express it in terms of their attendence at policy councils or even in

talks with people like the Secretary of Defense or the civilian executive side of Defense. On this, I think that McNamara himself probably started thinking initially that this was a military operation and just to be more efficient and effective the military should take over such things. I imagine that he talked that way to some of the military people that were seeing him from the JCS, and the Chiefs, and from the intelligence community, the military intelligence community. I know that DIA [Defense Intelligence Agency] got its great start under McNamara and I feel almost certain, I've got a strong hunch, that the Bay of Pigs and the misreading of the temper of the people in Cuba gave McNamara great impetus in setting that up initially. So it actually wasn't a military ambition to set up a rival intelligence agency to the CIA though there had been tremendous rivalry between the military service intelligence agencies and the CIA and had been right along from the initiation of CIA originally. But this was sort of a business rivalry and it wasn't

sort of dealing with them, of categories of work, and where the boundary lines of who did what on the thing and this is where their jealousies and emotions and everything would come up over almost nipicking of boundary lines of who would do what. It wasn't a thing of we'll do it all and you go out of business--that feeling hadn't come up--but every after the Bay of Pigs the DIA and its creation, a lot of the people in that who were civilian employees Defense Department employees, had an idea, "We can do a better job than CIA," and in a much wider field than the service intelligence agencies have done.

O'BRIEN: Are there enough skilled and competent people around, in the universities and the military, to staff all the intelligence agencies: the NSA [National Security Agency], DIA, CIA and organizations? Are there enough people or are these operations just simply too big?

LANSDALE: Indeed They might be too big. I The need to know things is a very elastic bit. I'm certain that the chief executive of the United States,

in whose name these works are accomplished, would have no idea that he would ever desire to know some of the things that they're working on very hard. You discover whole buildings and all sorts of equipment busily accumulating facts [illegible] would say, "I can't see [illegible] States ever needing to know some of that." Yet he would hesitate, given the world today and the technological advances and everything, it's very hard to say what you need to know and what you don't. Given this sort of a gray shading of the end objectives on this thing, it's very difficult to say whether you've got too big an establishment or not.

O'BRIEN: Do you ever take this question up, or is this question ever raised in the administration by the civilian people in DOD [Department of Defense] or the White House, with you?

LANSDALE: Not with me. No. My theme on overseas operations was reiterated enough so that it was known by a number of people, and I felt it was always more efficient and effective to have a very small group working and to choose them with very

great selectivity and go for a handful of highly qualified people rather than a large group of Americans charging overseas someplace. This went for intelligence as well as diplomatic and other economic work, and so on. I used to point out the embassies--for example, behind the Iron Curtain--that would get decimated by being TNT'd and so on. In Eastern Europe, for example, it would happen. It would wind up with an ambassador and two or three people left in an embassy, and their work would increase in quality, and their representing U.S. interests would seem to improve tremendously when that would happen.

O'BRIEN: Does the fact that you get this reputation, mainly out of the writings of guys like [Eugene] Burdick and Graham Greene, does this affect you in any way in your relations with the bureaucracy?

LANSDALE: Yes. It made life rather difficult. With much of the work that I had to do in Washington, I came back from a lot of operations abroad and went up into policy-forming levels in

Washington almost immediately, and into facing people who were very sensitive on my presence abroad initially. Since I didn't just stick in a regular military category but would get over into their own subject matter, this made them very uncomfortable. I can understand it while it happened, but it was carried to too great an emotional length.

At times I would suggest certain individuals be sent to look into a situation in a given country and would arrange their transportation and so on. I would get backing throughout the U.S. government for this thing and have an individual approved by the Secretary of State as well as Defense and up at the White House and so on, but would set up a means of communicating back so that we would get reports back. There would be times when these individuals would show up in a country, and the first time they sent a message to me, the ambassador would ask them kindly to leave the country, to get out of there, just because of my name. I apparently was the enemy to some of these

people. One of my assistants was traveling between Thailand and Saigon, and there was a coup going on in Saigon at the time. His plane, which was Air France, put down--commercial flight--in Phnom Penh, in Cambodia, and the military attaché very kindly picked up this guy and several other Americans from the plane and found a place for them to stay until they could get another flight out of Phnom Penh. He asked this lad of mine where he'd worked, and he said, "In the Pentagon"--he was a civilian employee--and he mentioned that he worked for me, and the attaché got all excited, called the ambassador, and he was given two hours to come out of the country. [Laughter] All he was doing was looking for a place to sleep at night. So it became very emotional and very silly, and detrimental to the U.S.

For example, once in Indonesia, in meeting our folks around the embassy in Djakarta, I had spotted an assistant army attaché, who was the one American, along with one of the economic mission guys--there were

two Americans who were not only best known by the Indonesians but were respected, and there was an affection there, and I have told the ambassador at the time, afterwards, make real use of these people; the Indonesians believe them, and there's some antipathy towards the U.S., but they make an exception to these two and they're just invaluable--but the army man was extremely close to the general staff of the Indonesian army. I went on some visits to members at their homes of the Indonesian General staff, and this lad who was tall and blond--a Nordic type, if you will--would go in, and the small brown Indonesians would and their families--welcome him like a long lost uncle or brother or something. The children would run up and jump in his arms and climb all over him, and he was Uncle "something" to them.

So later, when the Soviets start moving in SAMs [surface-to-air missle] missile sites into Indonesia and the U.S. needed to know what sort of antiaircraft armaments were going in, our embassy couldn't get the answers to it--

I suggested that we get the State Defense sponsorship and send this one fellow who is a lieutenant colonel over and just let him stay a week or so. He'd go right in and talk to his old friends and they'd probably tell him what the Soviets were up to. He arrived there; the Indonesian general staff took him out and showed him these sights and asked him what he thought of them and so on the first day he was there. That night he got back and wrote out a radio message, and asked the ambassador to send it to me at which point our ambassador told him to leave the country.

O'BRIEN: Now this was [Howard P.] Jones?

LANSDALE: That was Jones, yes. And he said, "Well let me put that in the message" so I just asked the Department of State to please let Jones know that you're sponsoring this guy too, and there might be some more things that he finds out that you need to know as much as we do." So they told Jones just to sit back

and let him do that.

We have some wonderful Americans, and this was what I was trying to do: to find out which Americans have not only our interests at heart but were enough interested in foreign countries to be able to understand and have [illegible] really would be serving the best interests of other countries in things. I'd far rather see one man get in on something like that than send a whole team in with all sorts of things and sort of aggravate a situation rather than do something rather simple.

O'BRIEN: Almost sensitivity training . . .

LANSDALE: Incidentally, along these lines, I've got a good story for your account.

O'BRIEN: Great.

LANSDALE: About the time of the Cuban Missile Crisis, McNamara came back from a meeting at the White House one day and asked me to provide the means for President Kennedy to talk to the Cuban people on T.V. How the hell did I know how to do that? He told me he wanted to do it within the next twenty-four

hours. Well, it didn't happen. I suspected that it would take longer than that; I don't know how you intrude on a T.V. stations broadcasting and get the people in the country to go immediately to their T.V. sets and watch a program. I called scientists in from all over the U.S., who were electronic whizzes on this type of a subject, and our intelligence people and everybody else I could think of to get some information together in a real crash basis. CIA couldn't give me details, on technical details on any of the T.V. stations in Havannah and elsewhere.

One of the Defense civilian scientists--and I can't think of his name offhand; East European name--left the room and came back ten minutes later and provided all the technical information to the great amazement of everybody there. And I said, "Where the hell did you get that? and he said, "Well, I went out to the corridor in the Pentagon (where we were having the meeting, wnt in one of the phone booths there, and I called a friend of mine

down in Havana who operates a T.V. station and asked him. He gave me all the dope and I just wrote it down." So this is the way we got the information for it. The intrusion of the T.V. space never took place, but we got the means together and some airborne T.V. transmitters. It was developed finally by the Navy and the project--I've asked it to put on a sort of sled so that it could be picked up and changed over from one aircraft to another, or used elsewhere--later when we started the T.V. broadcasts in Vietnam, this Navy equipment that was initially intended to let President Kennedy talk to the Cubans was the broadcast equipment that was used from the air--flying in the aircraft--in Saigon down to initiate T.V. broadcasts in Saigon in 1965.

O'BRIEN: Why didn't it come off?

LANSDALE: It took us too long to figure ways of getting in on the theme and finding a channel and finding a way of getting people that do that.

It took us ten, twelve days to do it, and the time for them to do it had passed over, and the Russians stood down in the interim, so the need had passed.

O'BRIEN: Well how do you come back into. . . . well, perhaps we ought to pursue this whole business of counterinsurgency first. It sort of becomes the thing with the Kennedy administration, doesn't it?

LANSDALE: Yes.

O'BRIEN: How do you see that? I was in the Marine Corps in the late fifties, and there was a good deal of guerrilla and counterguerrilla training that was going on, and it becomes a part of the new administration. Who are the principal proponents of this, outside of yourself? Do you have any conversations, say, with Bobby--well, you don't really see Bobby until after April. But do you have any conversations with the president, let's say, meeting with him . . . .

LANSDALE: No, no, I didn't. I don't know who talked to him about this. When he came in office, this was already one of his themes. Where he picked

that up originally, I don't know. I was rather surprised--he seemed to have seen copies of lectures and other things that I've given on the subject. But, who had passed those to him and who had talked to him about it, I just don't know.

O BRIEN: Let's say, let's take a person like Max Taylor. Do you have anything in the way of conversations with Max Taylor in the late fifties?

LANSDALE: No.

O'BRIEN: How about the rest of the Joint Chiefs?

LANSDALE: No. Taylor was opposed to this type of thing. He did quite a considerable switch, see? He was about the last person I would have ever picked to have headed up something the way Kennedy asked him to do it.

O BRIEN: That's what I was wondering about, Taylor's role in this whole thing. He is opposed.

LANSDALE: Well, he was the one that--in the very early

formation of the Special Forces in the Army--he was Chief of Staff of the Army at the time--and took one look at these American troops in green berets and said, "Take that God damn silly headgear off," or "Take that--that's it." No geeen berets, and he ruled the ______ out of the thing. He wasn't too happy with a special unit of that nature. But at the time, it was . . . . He went along with the concept that it was only a wartime outfit--that somebody would have to go and jump in and work with querrillas. Again, this is a rivalry type of a thing so there wouldn't be another OSS [Office of Strategic Services]--there'd be a CIA or something doing it, but this after all is part of the modern military function so let's make it military. So he went that far on the thing. But that was a concept--you'd have a regular force fighting battle and someplace back of the enemy lines you'd want to blow up bridges and

gather information and so on to support your tactical force, so well why not have somebody in working and fomenting trouble back there for the enemy, but connected with the forces. Now the concept of peoples war-fare now is pushed, we've seen them in Vietnam and elsewhere, really wasn't something that he or others understood at all, that almost all of us speak see guerrilla or counter-guerrilla, and that people like special forces might well, having learned guerilla operations, would then be qualified to start coping with them, would understand the importance of political basis for operations and political goals and behavior and the psychological part of the operations. This really wasn't in any of their thinking because, as witnessed in Korea, we went and sort of had a small World War II in Korea. And in Vietnam later, we went in, again with Taylor as the ambassador, but

having quite a bit of an advisory role with our military commanders out there, and influence with them, was fighting another Korea in Vietnam more or less. There was some changes in tactics but was more use of helicopters just for vertical envelopment rather than just instead of moving guys along the ground to with the thing.

O'BRIEN: Why don't they come to an understanding? [barking]

LANSDALE: I'm sure that's going to make a good broadcast for you, a good tape. . .

O'BRIEN: A diversion at least.

LANSDALE: I'm completely baffled by that. I just don't know.

O'BRIEN: Don't they read?

LANSDALE: They speak the words and particularly when they were talking with President Kennedy, they picked up the words and enthusiasm and responded, but would show by what they did that they didn't understand what they were saying. It's something that, of course, I have been trying to

do something about all along. I've never understood what it was. . . . I've always felt that I was too inarticulate or hadn't found a way of doing things for myself, but there have been so many other exponents of this thing--not just Americans, but of many countries, who have written rather good books on the subject and on parts of it that you'd surely think that we Americans would produce top leaders with some understanding of something that Mao [Tse-tung] and Giap and others have gotten every page down through the rank and file to understand.

O BRIEN: Well, in the formation of the CI group--it was designed, as I understand it, primarily as a kind of educational group for top level administration people--when do you first come into that group?

LANSDALE: I was never really part of that group. I was working with a smaller group of executives, of which Taylor was a part.

O'BRIEN: This is Mongoose, isn't it?

LANSDALE: Yes. This was a national security group of top executives close to the president, with the undersecretary of State, and the deputy secretary of Defense, and so on, and the national security advisor. ~~and~~ Taylor sat in on those meetings after he got his CI group going. But in forming the CI group iniatially, Taylor was starting to do some studies for Kennedy, and Kennedy had asked me to help him. So I put my staff in the Pentagon at Taylor's disposal. Initially, in Kennedy's presence, I offered to put together a study for Taylor on resources in the United States and among our allies for such things--not allies as much as friends of the United States in many countries--and this was done with ~~some~~ CIA and some of the military services and the intelligence part of State. They had a little working group, and we had several sessions in my office

and put together some rough first papers for Taylor to start his thinking for the president. Then when Taylor ~~started~~ formed his group, I wasn't invited in on it, and I didn't attend.

O'BRIEN: Sure. [illegible] got any insight. . . . [illegible] it, right after the formation of that group, and early--it was in May or June--they dispatched some teams to go around Latin America to survey the ability of various nations to respond to Castro-type guerrilla activity.

LANSDALE: Yes, yes.

O'BRIEN: Did you get involved in the planning of that at all or any of the fallout of that?

LANSDALE: Just peripherally on both. I forget the details on that. I had been worrying about places like Colombia and several other Latin American countries close to the Panama Canal and had urged that this be looked into, on some of the specific things that were being done there. I had encouraged ~~that~~ the Colombians to start civic action

in dealing with some of the dissident areas and so on. All I had done was, not planning as much as coming in with sort of a shopping list of what people might look for, and individuals in these countries they might talk to to get information on what was happening.

O'BRIEN: Well, are you in Colombia in the Kennedy administration at all as . . . .

LANSDALE: No. No, the most I did was--I went to Venezuala and during the Kennedy administration, and Bolivia. No, by that time folks were highly sensitive about my showing up in foreign countries--that is, Americans, not foreigners--and I really wasn't permitted, or I was stopped really at policy levels from going back into Vietnam or the Phillippines, or anyplace in Asia. I begged to be permitted to go down and take a look in Latin America, and Gilpatric was the one that told me the decision had been made....

BEGIN SIDE II TAPE I

O BRIEN: Outside of Venezuela, Did you get to any other countres?

LANSDALE: Well, Bolivia. In Bolivia, I was interested in particularly the Bolivian Air Force's work of setting up a public school system over in the eastern slopes of the Andes--down in the jungles and in the very sparse settlements. They were really the one governmental group that could get around places. They were very enthusiastically setting up one-room school houses down there, and flying in teachers and bringing some education in there, which I thought was a great project, and was encouraging them. Then, while I was in Bolivia, I got involved with the resettlement of Indians from the Altiplano over onto the eastern slopes into some new communities, in which the whole Bolivian government was involved. The U.S. economic mission was working with them, and the Bolivian military was supporting it with trucks and with some people going in. But this was a very exciting, agricultural-community-type of a project of moving people out where they'd have an economic chance at life and also a chance to own land. It was changing the social

structure considerably for the very lowest class in Bolivia, and with the armed forces doing it. This, again, was the very first visit.

In Venezuela, I had come up with some ways of safeguarding our own interests in Venezuela (which are not only oil production, but we have steel mills down there and a number of things) but I did this as much for the Venezuelan Defense Ministry as I did for the United States at the time. They were concerned.

O'BRIEN: What are your relations with the people involved in the school in Panama which spreads a lot of this gospel of civic action among the military? Are your relations with those people pretty good?

LANSDALE: It was. They had picked up a lot of my material from earlier times, in the form of lectures and memos that I had written on these subjects. When they set up the school, I talked with them on the program of instruction that they were going to give. The first adoption of any of these principles was in

Guatemala, and it worked very well there for a time. The Latin Americans became quite enthusiastic, though again jealousies come in. They thought the Guatemalans were boasting too much about it. So, when I was told that problem, I said, "Well, get them to emulate and try and beat them and get a healthy rivalry going," which is what happened actually.

O'BRIEN: I suspect [Fulton] Freeman is there as ambassador in Columbia when you're there--no, Freeman was in Columbia.

LANSDALE: Yes, he was in Columbia.

O'BRIEN: I can't think of the guy who was in Venezuala that was ambassador.

LANSDALE: Uh, he was from Arizona and was a journalist.

O'BRIEN: Not [Maurice M.] Bernbaum. LANSDALE: No.

O'BRIEN: Well, how is he to deal with, and do you get a chance to see [Romulo] Betancourt or any of the political leaders?

LANSDALE: Yes, I saw political leaders there. I had five days in Venezuala, and I think I got two hours' sleep all the time I was there. I found our ambassador there [C. Allan Stewart] at the time very open-minded and very good to work with. I wrote a report, coming back

from Venezuala afterward, and submitted it by the time I got to Washington. It went up to President Kennedy as well as Dean Rusk, and some of Rusk's staff immediately wired the ambassador and it was one of these, "You don't want to buy this, do you," and they said I'd come out with a report on Venezuala and here were the main points of my recommendations and some findings. He was just there five days. He couldn't possible have found out enough to come to these conclusions, isn't that right?" Bless his heart, the ambassador came back and said in effect, "I'm amazed that he found out that much, and the recommendations are sound, and we'd discussed this before he left and we're working with them already."

You don't have to be in a place long. For example, we had a pretty large American community down there who themselves were practically government; U.S. Steel and all our big oil companies and so on. There was very little relationship between the American

business community and the U.S. Embassy, and I had urged that they meet maybe once a week or once a month--the American executives and the Ambassador and several members of his staff and have lunch together rather frequently and discuss mutual problems because the U.S. firms down there had very large security staffs. They were very close to the police type of forces, the constabulary down there, and that the embassy would be very well informed from this as well as passing some of this information back to these people and everybody would gain by it. Well, this doesn't take very long to. . . . In talking to the vice president of U.S. Steel operations down there, and say, "One thing you would change if you had the power--what would it be," and he'd tell you something like this, you know, so, uh, it was rather easy to come up with this thing.

O'BRIEN: Did you find them fairly knowledgeable and enlightened about some of the things that you were very . . .

LANSDALE: Very much so, very much so.

O'BRIEN: Like rural economic development, and agricultural development.

LANSDALE: Particularly the oil companies, and I was surprised. Standard [Oil Company] ~~of New Jersey~~ showed me what it was doing because the rigs out in Lake Maracaibo were getting blown up, and their pipelines were getting blown up, by saboteurs coming in who were really expert. I found out later that they were affiliated with communists in Columbia and had come on over. They were really experts at explosives, and they weren't the student type of revolutionaries and so on, who also were present in Venezuela. But in seeing what they were doing, it went far beyond a company paternalism type of a thing for employees. ~~that~~ They started credit systems with farm groups and housing projects for people living in the vicinity of their plants-- ~~employees--~~ not their employees so much, who also gained a great deal out of this. And then U.S. Steel, in pushing its developments

way down to the south. . . . [Interruption] He probably wouldn't do it; he'd chew the wire in two here.

O'BRIEN: Oh my God. It's a wonder he hasn't electricuted himself. [Laughter]

LANSDALE: Yeah. It's not yours, it's some of mine.

O'BRIEN: Well, I'm not worried about that. Wires, these sort of wires can be replaced. I'm not sure about yours.

LANSDALE: Worse than rats.

O'BRIEN: Well, he's a spirited animal and ~~he~~ you can't help admiring that.

LANSDALE: Yeah. Well, one of the stories on Kennedy I'd like to put in was: On my reports from Vietnam in the very early days of--just before he was inaugurated, and he read it apparently right after the inaugural--one of the reports was a little side piece that I did on a village in South Vietnam inhabited by some Chinese refugees that President [~~Ngu Dunh~~ Ngo Dinh] Diem had located down in the midst of a communist-held territory, and I was very

impressed by them, ~~and~~ just as an example of what humans will do in such a situation, I'd written it up and turned in a separate report on it.

And about the ~~a~~. . . . It was still January, '61, about ten days after the inaugural, my telephone in the Pentagon rang, and this voice that sounded like ~~President~~ Kennedy's told me it was President Kennedy talking, and he had read this report of mine and wanted me to have it published in the Saturday Evening Post. I was at the time wondering which joker in the Pentagon ~~you know~~ was imitating this Harvard, Massachusetts accent and was putting me on, so ~~and~~ I said, "Yes, yes, yes." I then had my secretary check over at the White House, and sure enough, it had been President Kennedy, so I had to then go ahead--I'd promised to do it, ~~and~~ figuring out I didn't know how to get something in the Saturday Evening Post, but quickly found out how, and they published this thing afterwards as a report that the President wanted published in their magazine.

O'BRIEN: ~~Well that. . . .~~ You had taken, of course, you'd had that interest in Vietnam and Laos. . . . You talked to a lot of people, as I understand, about Laos and Vietnam ~~and~~ in the incoming administration. Did you have any intent or purpose in mind outside of just explaining the way that it was?

LANSDALE: That was principally my intent. The first meeting I had with McNamara, all he wanted to do was to have me tell him about Vietnam, and this was essentially what most of the incoming administrative officials, when they'd talk to me, would want me to explain what was happening and what the situation was. This essentially was how and why I felt on these subjects, but my thesis right along on this was to help the people in the countries to help themselves rather than to go in and do things for them. It was mostly on the nuts and bolts of ~~on~~ how you go about doing this, and the individuals you'd pick to do it, and how you'd select them, and please let's have highest quality and fewer people doing these

things.

O'BRIEN: Well, you have some successes and failures in--I guess mostly failures in the last of the Eisenhower administration--I'm thinking in terms of Laos. Laos is the immediate problem in 1961. How do you respond to some of these people who are in policy-making positions at that time? I'd like to get your feeling for them--people like [Walthers] Robertson--in the State department--~~people Robertson~~ and [J. Graham] Parsons; John Irwin in ~~the~~ Defense; and on the Agency side, people like [Desmond] Fitzgerald. How do they see . . .

LANSDALE: You have named a group of people, all of whom are friends of mine, and we were very friendly, and I had worked with a number of them for enough years so that we more or less understood each other and could take shortcuts in conversations and so on. All of those you named always in talks ~~and talked~~ with me expressed similar beliefs to mine, so it was very easy in talking to them, and there were others in the

Eisenhower administration. Now this wasn't true throughout the administration at all, but there was a considerable group of people who were in various executive slots just down the second and third level who had been through the . . . [Interruption]

O'BRIEN: Well, Laos, as I understand it, is, with the impact of the aid that's gone in there, it really does in some ways tear up the economy of the country. Now, how do you look on the training of the Laotian army in late 1960--or '59, '60--some of the activities of the Agency in Laos, as well as the army and through the PEO [Programs Evaluation Office] office and things like this? Is this the kind of thing that you envision in terms of--I hate to use the term "nation building"--helping a country to help itself, in helping people to help themselves?

LANSDALE: Yes, as long as in the modern world the leaders of the country will think in terms of as large a military establishment as they can afford in a country. And they do this without any advice from anybody. This is just a natural,

self-preservation type of an impulse on their part. Then my thought is: They will be doing this. Then let's make the military establishment serve the country in a much bigger way than merely toting guns around and guarding borders. It's usually the organization that is nationwide and there might not be any other organization that's nationwide in the country, such as agriculture, even the administrative structure that usually comes under the department or ministry of the Interior won't really have the manpower, the communications and so forth that the military forces do. So, given that, why not then get the military to start doing constructive things around and making full use of the manpower that you have anyhow. Have them be good military men as the very first requisite of this, but given that, then there's still energy and personnel and so forth involved in that who have a lot of man-hours left over that could do other things and essentially this is what I was trying to get the American advisory missions

to do--not only the military advisory missions, but when other agencies would get in and be working on these things, to themselves become interested in the military doing such things, and aiding and abetting, including economics projects and educational work and so on.

O'BRIEN: Well, in this Laotian deterioration that takes place, ~~you know~~ the competing people there--Phoumi [Nosavan] ~~[Vongbichit]~~ and Souvannah Phouma and all--how do you read that in 1960 just prior to the administration coming in? ~~Do you~~ How do you see Phoumi; how do you see Souvannah Phouma, as people? First of all, have you met them at any time?

LANSDALE: Yes, yes, yes, I didn't know them well at all. I'd met them ~~at~~ usually at formal gatherings of one kind or another. The main thing that I saw in Laos in the way of political stability actually stemmed out of the king of Laos; this was the only unifying political force that existed there in the minds of all of the various Lao leaders whom I'd met. So when the others started splitting and opposing one another, I

had already felt that our best bet was to turn to the king and force him to--or, not force, but to encourage him to taking the leadership role that would be the one thing acceptable to all these leaders. Instead of that, we were starting to become parts in ourselves there and playing off one guy against another, and Americans aren't good at that game. We have many Americans who think they are, but this I think is a little too and we fell in love with the factions and people, almost unconscious of the fact that we were doing that. The paratroop leader there . . .

O'BRIEN: Kong Le?

LANSDALE: Yeah, who kicked over a revolt had spent the night before his coup with a group of American friends, and there wasn't a damn one of them that knew that he was going to have a coup in the morning. This type of a thing, I just found inconceivable. People get nervous and sort of absent-minded about what's happening at the time when they're planning an action

like that the next morning, and somebody there among the Americans should have been sensitive enough to have said, "Well, aren't you feeling well?" or something, ~~you know,~~ and had gotten some feeling on it. But this sort of getting in bed with people socially and saying, "He's a good fellow," and "He's all right," and "he's my friend," and excusing everything is a common blindness, and this had worried me in Laos quite a bit.

O'BRIEN: Well, I get the impression from a reading of this period that there really is some lack of coordination in the various efforts that are there; in other words, the ambassador is not completely privy to what the Agency is doing, and the Agency is not completely privy to what DOD is doing through the PEO office. Do you get that feeling? Maybe in regard to the Parsons-Irwin-[John F.] Reilly mission that goes out there, do you get any feeling over that at all?

LANDSALE: Yes, I'm trying to recall. . . . We hit a crisis at that point, and the group that went out--Parsons was on home leave, and we had a

meeting in the Pentagon in the secretary of Defense's office, and there were a mob of people there. There were--I can't quite recall now what prompted the meeting, but it there was a crisis of some sort in Laos. And the JCS gave a briefing, that's right, as part of the thing, and it was on the Pathet Lao positioning, and they suddenly discovered that there were passes over the mountains that had some importance to the Ho Chi Minh trail, and this great discovery was being lectured on at this meeting. And at the time, the Secretary of Defense--I [illegible] think, I wonder, that might have been [Thomas, Jr.] Gates [Jr.] at the time, might have been, but whoever it was--asked if I had a comment to make, and I said, "Take a look at that map that the JCS was showing us of Pathet Lao and the other situations on the thing," and I said, "it should tell everybody here just one thing. You've got an ambassador who is on home leave here. he doesn't belong here; he belongs out in Vientiane right this moment. and the rest of

you who are asking questions ought to have people out there with him who would tell you immediately and take a first-hand look." And the a. . . . . . I remember Irwin was picked right on the spot to go immediately and said to me on the side, "You and your big mouth you know." [Laughter]

O'BRIEN: Well, did you get involved in any of the meetings on Laos after the Kennedy administration comes in, and some of the jockeying that goes around?

LANSDALE: Some of them, yes. I can't quite recall which meetings they were at the time. I was in on some of the questions of the support of the Maos, the guerrilla forces.

O'BRIEN: Well how did you see in terms of a strategy for the area? There is a, as I read it, there seems to be some various strategies proposed; one is a, you know, going down the full road behind Phoumi and supporting Phoumi, and another is the panhandle strategy--I've never been able to quite understand what the panhandle strategy was--that, you know, rings

a bell.

LANSDALE: ~~Hmm, yeah well, hmm,~~ My memory isn't too good on this thing. There was some talk at the time--there's high country across the Bolovens Plateau and so forth down in the south, and there was talk at the time--of that being the dominant area, and what we should do was to make use of that and the high ground in Vietnam and so on, across into Thailand, and ensure that that ~~state~~ stayed in noncommunist hands.

O'BRIEN: Well, there's also suggested in the Laotian crisis as early as 1961, the use of strategic bombing on supply routes, and even, as I understand it, to Hanoi, as early as that, and ~~in addicting~~ interdicting some of the supply lines, as well as the suggestion--that subsequently in 1962 does become a reality--the dropping of the SEATO [Southeast Asia Treaty Organization] plan five, as I understand it was called. How did you feel about the Laotian crisis at that point, in terms of a strategy or a direction ~~at~~ which should work?

LANSDALE: Well, I had wanted the Laotians to defend their country and I was all for the work with the Maoists and so on of doing it. Once it left that and started involving us Vietnamese or us, on bombing or anything else, I felt that the cost of saving some real estate would be too high to ever engage in. And on the bombing, I felt that as long as you had all of the communication with the people means in the hands of communist leaders such as in North Vietnam and then Hanoi where this was pushing, that anything overt such as aerial bombing that would then permit them to use that as a unifying force psychologically with the people would be dead wrong. I used to remind them of what [Winston] Churchill had done with the German bombing of Britain and just on radio with the people and here were leaders with complete access to radio and working with the people and it would have a reverse effect as far as trying to stop the ambitions and aims and so forth of the North Vietnamese, who after all the guys organizing

the Pathet Lao and pushing on into the area.

I felt that more could be done with the armed forces of Laos themselves in making them more able to stand up for themselves and defend their country. But if it couldn't, I couldn't see an intervention of any sort in there. Morally, we'd have been on a moral ground then to turn around and start using some international moral pressure, through the press and so forth, to sort of shame the North Vietnamese out of their attempts. I'm a great believer in exposing things to bring such pressure.

O'BRIEN: Well, how do you see the relationship of Vietnam and Laos at that point, or do you?

LANSDALE: Oh, yes. The passes and the Ho Chi Minh trail in bringing things down was one of the key things on this. But again, there was even talk at the time of taking Vietnamese troops in there, secretly, and using them up to try and stop that, and I was opposed to that. I didn't want to see intervention like that from the outside.

O'BRIEN: Well, when does some of the covert activity, in terms of the use of some of the Montagnards in interdicting those supply lines in Laos from Vietnam, start? Is that going on in the late Eisenhower administration, or does it begin in the Kennedy administration?

LANSDALE: I think it was the Kennedy administration. There had been a little of it, or there had been talk of it, in the Eisenhower administration. There had been thoughts along that line by the top Vietnamese leaders in 1955-'56. I remember President Diem's brother, his older brother, went into Laos in about '55 or maybe '56, and had come up with a scheme very similar to that at the time. He had talked about the mountain people of Laos being akin to the mountain people of Vietnam, and wouldn't it be good to get some of our mountain people in with them, and together they could be trained.

O'BRIEN: Yes, well, you're in Vietnam in the middle of the fifties, and then you go back in 1960 in the late Eisenhower administration. What's

changed, or has anything?

LANSDALE: Oh, a great deal. Excuse me. [Interruption]

O'BRIEN: What changes do you find?

LANSDALE: Well, the main change was in a growing isolation from reality of the constituency of the President of Vietnam, a repression of, you might say, a loyal opposition or a noncommunist opposition to them in political terms, a professionally some among the military that was taking the Vietnamese military apart from their people more than it had been when I had left because I had gotten them working very closely with a number of [illegible] projects, and a growing isolation of the American embassy in particular but including some of the American agencies from the Vietnamese officialdom, and taking a very strange form of concentrating on gossip essentially--gossip as much as fact--about oh, what the hell's the word I'm trying to think of, of misdeeds

and so forth by public officials or people connected with the regime in Vietnam so that the information gathering process of the United States there was devoting an exorbitant amount of time on sort of nitpicking on the people that were in power. The relationships such as the ambassador with the president of the country, the ambassador would go into details of malfeasance in office and so forth, or mishandling of funds by the Vietnamese on an internal matter, and the president would have to correct him and say you don't have all the facts and the ambassador would say, Yes I do too. This to me was very poor. I felt that we had some Americans that were close enough to the top officials of the Vietnamese who weren't present in the country always, who should be brought there and told, "Look, we understand these guys are doing something wrong.

Can you go in and get them to start doing things right as a friend of theirs?" rather than going and trying to scold them and something and getting the backs up of people, and they'd figure "Well these damn nosey Americans only got half the facts, and since they don't understand us that well the hell with them. We aren't going to do what they want." I just felt that we weren't playing a very wise ballgame there at the time, on the American side. I also felt that Diem was paying too much attention to similar types of his own people, his intelligence people, who were in turn telling him what the Americans were doing too damn much, or were bringing in alarming news about his own subjects--and particularly political oppositionists--and I suspect manufacturing cases against them so that they could take actions and he in turn was getting too much

secondhand from people and this tended to isolate him more since his main intelligence officer was his brother [Ngo Dinh] Nhu who was an ambitious person too. I felt that it was a poor arrangement on the Vietnamese side. I personally urged Diem at the time to get in touch with some of his opposition ~~and~~ at which point he asked me where I had been at certain times of the day during my visit there and I said, I was talking to your opposition and I'm not going to tell you who it was or where I was, but just the mere fact that you know that shows that you were having me trailed around ~~and~~ you know I'm a friend of your country's and I'm trying to help all of you succeed here, and you happen to be the elected leader and you jolly well better start reflecting what your people desire ~~and~~ if you ~~d~~ spend your time and money and efforts and so forth watching

a guy like me, I'm sure you're doing a lot more for someone else you really suspect and--

O BRIEN: How would he react to something like this?

LANSDALE: Listen, I was told by a number of people that I was about the only one that really ever talked to him in this manner, and he would listen and at the time, one of the people most critical of him was his vice-president, and I went over and saw the vice-president whose name was [Nguyen Ngoc] Tho, and Tho immediately started telling me that the president had spies all over his office and in his staff and as he was telling me this, one of the clerks was serving us tea and I said, Is this guy one of the president's spies? and he said, "Probably, I think so." [Laughter] Maybe he'll go back and report this one. I said, When was the last time you two talked to each other? Well it had

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O BRIEN: How would he react to something like this?

LANSDALE: Listen, I was told by a number of people that I was about the only one that really ever talked to him in this manner, and he would listen and at the time, one of the people most critical of him was his vice-president, and I went over and saw the vice-president whose name was [Nguyen Ngoc] Tho, and Tho immediately started telling me that the president had spies all over his office and in his staff and as he was telling me this, one of the clerks was serving us tea and I said, Is this guy one of the president's spies? and he said, "Probably, I think so." [Laughter] Maybe he'll go back and report this one. I said When was the last time you two talked to each other? Well it had

been months so I went back to Diem and I jumped him. I said, "You've got a vice-president who you've made responsible for all the economic development of the country, and I know that you consider that very important. You haven't talked to him for a long time," and I forced him to tell me when ~~you'd~~ he'd done it last so I said, "Well, pick up the telephone and call him over here your first free time, and you sit down and have a long talk with him." So he did it. He picked up the phone, and I got the two of them together again. He was really out of touch. He promised me at the time to get in touch with some of ~~the~~ his political opposition, he swore up and down he wasn't oppressing anyone, and I said, "Well, you don't know what your own police are doing, then," and I gave him the list of names of people who were in prison, who had been arrested at midnight and pulled out of their homes and

so on, and he promised to look into their cases immediately and do something about it. And I said, "I've gotten this from people who are in the opposition to you, but I don't know ~~if~~ whether you've ever gotten any reports." He said he'd never heard of these cases, and I think he was telling the truth. He had no reason to dissemble with me at all on these things.

O'BRIEN: Well, why is this? Is it the development of an independent bureaucracy, or is ~~there a~~ it the degree of U.S. influence on, let's say, the intelligence, ~~knew~~ Nhu. . . .

LANSDALE: There was probably some. . . . I think by that time the Vietnamese intelligence was way beyond any control by U.S. intelligence, who initially had been helping it, and Diem's brother Nhu was really--really had the bit in his teeth and was his own man. And I suspect, initially, he was really trying to serve his

brother, and he was doing it by trying to get the goods on everybody working for his brother throughout the government and anybody opposed to his brother and the intelligence people, picking it up, discovered that if they brought in bad news about some guy that the brother didn't like, he'd pay them and believe it. So I'm sure that there was a lot of manufactured evidence in the intelligence take that was coming in and I don't think the Americans were screening any of that type of information because it went right into the palace, and there was a big room behind the president's office that had many files and was the main personnel dossier type of file place.

O'BRIEN: Well, you're critical of the MAAG [Military Assistance Advisory Group] operation there. What's wrong with it, in the late '50's?

LANSDALE: Well, I felt that MAAG under "hanging" Sam [[Samuel T.] Williams in the late '50's was

an unusually well-run American military operation. There were some unusual things being done that made it so. One of them was one of the best ideas I've ever bumped into.

General Williams brought over the chief of staff of the Vietnamese army whenever the American advisors—who at that time were out in the countryside, but ~~were~~ ~~at~~ at fairly high levels, and were running training camps more than advising on operations or anything. But when they would come in once a month for a weekend in Saigon, Williams would get the Vietnamese Chief of Staff to come in and talk to them. The Vietnamese Chief of Staff at that time was General [Tran Van] Don. Don was quite diplomatic, but had a way of being candid in his remarks and not having them hurt too much when they were told. He would leave out names and so on, but he would tell these Americans what

their Vietnamese counterparts in the Vietnamese army and so forth thought of them, and their work, and their advice, and the reactions throughout the armed forces to them. This was the one part of the monthly gatherings with Americans around that everybody would stop dozing off or thinking of something else and would sit up and pay attention because they were the subject of the talk, of course. This was a very healthy thing. . .

O'BRIEN: Yes, I can ~~feel~~ see where it I would be.

LANSDALE: . . . because even though it was tough diplomatically, the most sordid truth, ~~would~~ the hardest facts would come out in first. ~~the.~~ And then Williams himself had been in Vietnam a long enough time by then--I forget how long; it may be three years at the time, four years--so that when he moved around the Vietnamese army, it wasn't only just the top staff officers and commanders who would be with him, but I noticed in a visit I made there--I

think it was '59--that sergeants and junior lieutenants and so on would come up and talk to him and I'd moved in close enough to eavesdrop on some of the conversations and these were personal problems, family problems, and financial problems and so forth that individuals had and this was a very unusual relationship for an American to have. And since the American was also running our advisory effort too, I just figured that this constant feeding and contact with the echelons of Vietnamese military that were down below the big wheels was again a very healthy influence that was constantly at work with him. So that he would know very well what was going on in places. Some of these problems--personal problems--would actually involve the military work that was going forward, people griping that something was wrong and so on and they were doing this out of a friendship

and it was not to tell on their bosses or anything, but usually personal worries and concern that wastage or something going wrong would affect them. Later they moved in an educator--a military educator--[Paul D.] Harkins, and. . .

O'BRIEN: Well, [Lt. Gen. Lionel C.] McGarr comes in there before that, doesn't he?

LANSDALE: McGarr. It was McGarr, yes, you're right. It was before Harkins. McGarr. And McGarr built up a staff to work on counterinsurgency and probably put together the best staff studies on counterinsurgency that any American military men have ever done.

O'BRIEN: Is that right?

LANSDALE: He got American military men who had been guerrilla leaders in the Philippines, for example, in World War II, and in Burma and so on, and in Europe, and switched most of his work over into compiling "How to Do it" manuals, but I've never seen the finished

products. I saw them working on it at the time, and all I know is they had tremendous stacks of papers with the results of their typed-out work and were putting it together.

And the interpretation of this ~~was~~ apparently was to start increasing staff and American military personnel to handle whatever ~~whatever~~ was coming up out of this whole process. The feeling was ~~was~~ that there should be closer American supervision of what was happening out in units, ~~Eunice,~~ which meant ~~we'll~~ you'd put down your Americans at lower echelons and then get a separate reporting system on back, feeding in the research process of the Americans initially more than anything else.

It wasn't for control; it was just for information that would go into fields of study. ~~and~~ This ~~lead~~ led to a proliferation of an American military presence that was intended sort of for the education of Americans, I think, more than anything else, but of course didn't work out that way. You

put some red-blooded American boys in uniform out someplace and they're going to start doing other things as well. In collecting information they couldn't help but tell a guy, "Well, if you didn't do it this way and did it the other way, it would work better," and so on. It's a very human thing that started working and as this happened we started building up our advisory effort more and more.

O'BRIEN: Well, in the meantime while this is going on, the insurgency's building up, isn't it?

LANSDALE: Yes.

O'BRIEN: Just what is the condition of the countryside that's different from when you're there in the middle fifties '50s and when you go back in

LANSDALE: Oh, there were guerrilla by an enemy which there hadn't been in the period from Geneva on up to the time I left in the end of '56 You could drive roads at night and so forth

and not be worrying about guerrillas. There were isolated incidents of violence, but they were very minor--it would be about what you'd expect in any country crime rate going--the fact that former Vietnam guerrillas were the guys pulling the trigger didn't matter too much as far as the overall crime rate went. It was in a nature of minor terrorism was going on. By my next visits later in the '50's, there were areas of guerrilla bands at work with roads that were unsafe and so on in areas that were unsafe with great problems of police posts being attacked and with their families being wiped out in small massacre type of things, though the type and degree of violence had increased a great deal. By the end of '60--when I got there in Christmas of '60--there were fair-size enemy, Vietcong units operating and dominating areas--it had escalated considerably by then.

O'BRIEN: Is this terrorism campaign on the local officials as serious as some of the people have written? ~~about it?~~

LANSDALE: Oh, yes.

O'BRIEN: Do you ever get any feeling about the number of people? I've heard all kinds of estimates.

LANSDALE: No, I've got [Stephen T.] Hosmer's study there on that, and I haven't read it yet. I just got that from him. I imagine he's got a figure in there. The last figure I remember on it was--in about '66 around ~~was about~~ forty thousand ~~40,000~~ or something . . . .

O'BRIEN: Forty thousand. That many?

LANSDALE: Yes. These were officials, not their families or anything. But these were village officials and district officials and sort of federal government officials.

O BRIEN: Well, what do you see happening as a result of this in terms of the ability of Diem to just simply govern in those years? Is his ability ~~the value~~ to govern deteriorating?

LANSDALE: Yes. In some ways it was. Initially he was unwilling to delegate any authority at all and he had the tendency to try and do everything himself. If the problem came up in agriculture, he would be the guy to do all the paper work and the deciding rather than his Minister of Agriculture and so on. He had gotten over that to a very large extent later so he had learned to be more the administrator and executive later on as far as putting some authority in the hands of others. But at the same time, he also seemed to have lost some of his critical faculty of some of the things that were going wrong, of not being able to see it. He was getting around the country and visiting but not as much anymore because of the security problems. He had been shot at several times so that he had a larger and larger security guard around him all the time which meant that when he went in and talked to people,

they were very much aware of plain clothes policemen, secret service types all around him, and others that were screening out people so that the dialogue between the president and the people became thinner and thinner and less and less meaningful. So while he was on paper becoming a better executive, he was in terms of being the national leader was being less effective all the time because he had no means of measuring what was true and what wasn't; what was worth doing and wasn't, and what was work and what wasn't. It was a considerable impairment of his critical faculty. This was one of the reasons I was urging him to start dialogues with his political opposition even if it started at opposite poles and led to tremendous emotional clashes, that there would be some means for dialogue to take place that would have been useful to him, particularly if he had invited them into a

meal or something, and had some way of ~~fattening~~ dampening the most emotional irritations that would take place, just ~~how the~~ out of people ~~seemed~~ being polite at the time; so the content of what they ~~had~~ would have to say would be something that he wasn't getting at elsewise.

O'BRIEN: Yes, well, as I understand it, the V.C. [Viet Cong] make a great deal of headway in those years on the basis of the land system.

LANSDALE: That was one of them.

O'BRIEN: Well, what. . . . As I understand it, there's some rub between the U.S. in this regard and Diem about putting through some land reform which would cure some of the rural cultural problems that the French had sort of created, as I understand, from ~~you know~~ the Vietnamese moving into the country. . . .

LANSDALE: Yes, yes.

O'BRIEN: Well, how do you see that? Are you pushing him for this sort of thing at that point?

LANSDALE: Yes. Actually, ~~we have~~ he had some very sound land

reform measures on the books and had issued decrees on them that were good. As usual, the difficulty is when you get a piece of legislation or something is then implementing it correctly and I was pushing him mostly on implementing his measures. Now the land reform worker that Diem approved and used as the basis for his decrees came from Wolf Ladejinsky and Wolf was, when he left U.S. employment, actually employed by Diem as his advisor on the subject, and Wolf was getting over and having breakfast with Diem quite a bit. Wolf is a very articulate, personable type of a guy and there was a great deal of affectionate friendship between the two men so that Wolf, who is a champion of reforms and of helping the man on the land, had full access to this guy and had a way of doing things. And I felt that the main thing that needed doing was demonstrating to President Diem who was sympathetic towards this, of where

things weren't going right and changing some of the inner workings of the thing instead of just falting him on intent. And his intent was very sound, very good. I think he was ignorant of some of these things going wrong. I felt that we should have borne down on the matters in which he was ignorant and tried to get some changes there and make these things work because certainly landlords and others were circumventing the law of the land that Diem thought was operating or when he circumvented it, he was doing it for good reasons of his own, which was again open to education by somebody of him but he was moving in people whom he could trust--who were refugees--into farm communities and distributing land to them for security reasons and political reasons and so on, and then dictating what they would grow and so on because he'd just figure, Well, in the national economy we need this

type of fiber grown or this type of crop or something and the land will produce it up there and so they should do that. So he was only circumventing the law for the greater good, in his own mind, in his own extent.

O'BRIEN: This centralization brings about a reaction though, doesn't it?

LANSDALE: Yes.

TAPE II SIDE I

LANSDALE: You asked about the falling out between Ladejinsky and Diem. I know there was something of that nature, but what it consisted of, or why, I don't know. I remember that the American ambassador . . .

O'BRIEN: It would have been [Elbridge] Durbrow?

LANSDALE: Durbrow ______ was mindful of the fact that Ladejinsky was having breakfast with Diem and was close to him, and in a rather general way to bring up thoughts of corruptions in

the government and subjects beyond anything like land reform. And I suspect that Ladejinsky had started getting very political in his talk, as a result of this, with Diem, and that Diem had resented it.

But beyond this, there was a very deep affection between the two. When I was there in '59 or '60, Ladejinsky had wanted to go someplace; and I forget where it was. . . . I know one of the places was Indonesia, but there was another country he wanted to go to, and Diem hadn't wanted him to go, and had suggested that he attend a conference--I think in Latin America. Finally, they had agreed between the two of them, and Ladejinsky had gone on to do these other things. He had taken sort of a sabbatical leave to do that.

But this was a very personal thing between two men, and it was two friends, rather than a president and his consultant working. I know Ladejinsky is very sentimental about

Diem as a man, and I know that Diem reciprocated this very much. There was a point where the rational thought would end, and the feelings of affection and so forth would come over, and say, "Well, even if that is true and everything, I still like the guy, and I want to help him," and so on. And this existed between the two. So they might have differed on some things and perhaps on carrying out land reform exactly the way that Wolf wanted, but the two men kept seeing each other all the time, and he had ample opportunity to work on that.

O'BRIEN: The suggestion that's made sometimes is that the Vietnamese military had not been trained for the kind of war and the kind of insurgency that they did encounter in 1960-61--they had not been properly trained for that before. Is there any validity in this at all?

LANSDALE: Oh yes, They were being trained actually to meet the challenge that the Vietnamese and American top officials foresaw, and they were thinking that--this--and incidentally, the French General [Paul] Ely before he left was thinking the same way--just in terms of contigency planning, they saw a lot of artillery and armor being given the North Vietnamese army. So, being given that information, they saw any attack or military trouble in Vietnam as consisting of divisions of North Vietnamese with a lot of artillery and armor coming across the border. So they built up an army to meet the foreseeable thing that was happenings that they thought might happen. Instead of this of course, it was more of the same old story again and there were many of the officers in the Vietnamese armed forces who had formerly been guerrillas themselves, who had formerly had been Viet men in the old days of fighting the French, who had broken with the communists and wanted no part of the communists and were very sincere, patriotic nationalists. But

since they had had and this former affiliation and had taken their basic military training with the enemy, so to speak, they never quite had the same stature among their fellow officers in the Vietnamese army, for example, as graduates of the Vietnamese Military Academy and the others coming right out of high school and so on. So as a result, the officers corps who were knowledgeable and of how to counter what was happening were kept at fairly junior grades, and in the late fifties the highest any of them got that I ever knew about was the rank of Major. They had to take orders from colonels and so forth who had served under the French in very much the same type of a conventional military organization as the Americans had put up and were advocating. And these junior types who wanted to do different things were simply too junior to do it and were unable to convince anyone of the need.

The initial meeting of the threat was thought more to be a police problem than an army problem, and there was a lot of work

on trying to equip and train the national police to cope with it, and we Americans did that through our economic mission and through Michigan State University had a group helping on administration there. They recruited some very good police officials from the U.S. who were quite used to dealing with urban crime problems in the U.S. Well, you can't take a man who is very good at precinct work in Detroit, Michigan or Burmingham, Alabama or something and move him out to an Asian country where his problem is: What do you do when a company of guerrillas comes in and ambushes your police station? A completely foreign type of a thing, so that we had police advisors that were insisting on all policemen being armored with nothing more than say a 38-caliber revolver, with the policemen saying, "Yeah, but people are shooting at us with rifles, and we need rifles or something like that to shoot back at them, or how about sub-machine guns or some--we need more fire power." Well, it was foreign

to them. So there was a mixup on a number of things on this coping with the insurgency that was growing, not only the conventional formation of the Vietnamese army but of a conventional urban police formation of the police. And yet, throughout the systems there, there were many individuals who knew better, and who knew how to cope with it, and who were continually begging, "Give us a chance to do it some other way."

O'BRIEN: Well, in terms of these people we were talking about a little earlier--the late Eisenhower people, like Fitzgerald and Irwin and Parsons--do they conceive of the kind of insurgency that's developing in South Vietnam at that point, or are they . . . ?

LANSDALE: Fairly well. Fairly well. They were more aware of, or had more understanding of, the needs than did some of the folks that were coming in sort of brand new to the problem or who had been steeped in a far more conventional approach to the problem, as were some of our military leaders at the time. But, as I remarked earlier, these were personal

friends of mine and when I'd talk to them and tell them my views, there was always sympathy for them so I might have mistaken that for understanding and so on and even that was rare enough so that I felt that. . . [Interruption]

O'BRIEN: How long is the manuscript?

LANSDALE: Ho ho. I went through first--the publishers wanted me to tell all; another words just write as much as I could for later editing and said this is the way people do it. So I wound up with really three of really long books and since I was writing one not too long book, why I wound up with a tremendously long manuscript. And urged them that I could cut it down to two books and publish it as two different things, and the subject matter would have permitted me. They still want just one book, so I am now going back with editor's notes and with my own notes and trying to. . . . I'd started off initially with a cut and paste job, but I discovered I couldn't do that and retain the proper narrative and entries on the thing, but I wound up having

to rewrite almost of all of it, and recast it, and retell it in a somewhat different form. I'm about half-way through that, but it'll be a fair-size book even so.

O'BRIEN: Well that's good--mainly on the Philippines and the early period in Vietnam?

LANSDALE: Umhmm.

O'BRIEN: Good, you know that's really . . .

LANSDALE: Well, there's really one big period in Vietnam that isn't known too well and most historians have passed over it and the ones who haven't have been championing a cause and their work is quite suspect. Some of the French were sort of agents en provocateurs at the time and they are more or less justifying what they did, and leaving out important parts of it.

O'BRIEN: How about the French journalist [Jean] Lacouture? What do you think of his work? Is it Lacouture that's done the thing on Ho [Chi Minh]?

LANSDALE: Yeah, I'm trying to remember. I think that's who it was. Well, most of the French writings about Ho and some of the explanations in

official documents of the French, trying to explain him and so on, by friends, I found very interesting. I had no way of judging really on it. There was a tremendous sympathy and so forth being expressed, and then a very strong attempt to work out an accommodation with him afterwards, by the French. And again, a highly emotional sensitivity to any interference with what they were trying to do, and they saw almost anything as interference.

So, what is written by them, I read mindful of their sensitivities at the time and what they're trying to prevent anybody ever believing that would be opposite at all, or something different at least. It was just amazing. The French press was screaming that I was starting World War III in Vietnam in '55 . . .

O'BRIEN: Mind if I get this on tape--well, it is on tape, I'm sorry. I didn't realize it was going.

LANSDALE: . . . simply because I think there was a feeling by the French colonialists in Indochina of not wanting to give up the French presence there.

and it's a human understandable type of a thing. They had been there and associated there, and some of them had spent their entire lives there, and here they were having to give up something and Swiss journalist once explained it to me: It was like a man giving up his mistress and seeing some big guy in a big car driving by in the street and even though he'd given him up, he'd just say well he hates that guy because he got the mistress allegedly with material means such as an automobile and maybe a fur coat and so on and isn't the man that the former guy was. So some of this feeling was very prevalent there and for some reason or other, I happened to suddenly become the focal point of it through my name or something or other so that they went to great lenghts of charging me with all sorts of things that I was doing: I was out buying up the loyalties of set courses with millions of dollars and things that would be hard to prove that I wasn't, mind you, except that to say, "Look, I didn't have a million dollars to buy anything with." And they'd

say, "Well, the U.S. government did and you were a secret agent for them and so on. It was very hard to disprove some of the talk and say, Well, that just isn't so. Except once in a while they'd get really wild and claim I was down--I walked in on a briefing for example with French officers telling some American visitors from Washington, at that very moment I was trying to buy off a sect leader, and very naively, with a suitcase full of money and I didn't know but the guy was going to ambush me and take all the money and not do whatever I was going to plan to do. And at that moment I just asked him, I said, Well, please keep on with your briefing, I want to know whether the guy killed me or not. Crazy. Now these were very responsible French officials and the fact that I'd be miles away from the scene of some of these things never stopped the circulation of these stories. I don't know how you ever stop that stuff.

O'BRIEN: Yeah, well how about people like Bernard Fall and Patty Huny and their writings? Are they . . .

LANSDALE: Well, they're very sound, very sound. Fall's background, as was Honey's, was out of intelligence or information collection units and their different countries. Fall's initial writings were all out of a French army historical sect, and I had to tell him one time I had read some of his work originally by the original author. But, it was a detailed military history of operations that he'd delved into and I don't know, I doubt that it was intentional plagarism on his part. He was probably rushing through, getting a book published for academic credits and so on. And Honey, the same way with British intelligence who were quite active in Indochina during the French days. But it was--some of the stories and happenings were just almost incredible. ~~The~~ Some of the French journalists were politically partisan. They had connections with the Communist Party or sympathies with them of some sort. And Ho had been one of the founders of the French Communist Party, so there was always a cultural or comradeship feeling of some sort there and when the

Americans started showing up on the scene, there was very paternalistic feeling of "Well, these are our people--these Vietnamese or Khmer or Lao, and you keep your cotton-picking fingers off of them" type of a thing that went to very great lengths--volatile emotions erupting on this type of a thing.

I remember one of the journalists, John Beret, published a newspaper in Saigon and wrote a lot of the early propaganda for individuals in the French army and had sort adventurer types among them. He then went to Pnohm Penh, where he started a weekly newspaper and started also writing speeches for [Norodom] Sihanouk and the next thing I knew, Sihanouk was accusing me of plotting to murder him or assassinate him and I hadn't even been near Cambodia, and I hadn't thought of Sihanouk when this happened. The governor of Siem Reap, who had been very close to Sihanouk before--and Siem Reap is where Angkor Wak and the historical ruins are--suddenly died, and the story started seeping out a little bit with Sihanouk charging that this governor, whose

name was Dap Chhuon, and I were in a conspiracy to murder him and take over the government of Cambodia. And it didn't do any good that I had never met Chhuon and never had any dealings with him, and Cambodia was way outside my bailiwick. But this is the story that's gone on and on and on.

O'BRIEN: Well, there was a little bit of truth to that, wasn't there? Some involvement of CIA. . . .

LANSDALE: Dap Chhuon? Yes. Well, he was a national leader and actually had formed the political groupings initially that supported Sihanouk and gave him his political power. He was the organizer; he was the chief political lieutenant of Sihanouk. And then apparently, he felt that Sihanouk was going sour, and he wanted to get the government back into reflecting more the will of the people. How far he got, I don't know. But this was really something that was foreign to me at the time.

I got sent back into Cambodia afterwards, from Washington, with various military assistance groups or economic groups or presidential commissions

and so on and each time they'd have Pnohm Penh on the thing I'd say, "We'd better check the embassy there." Back would come word that No, Sihanouk was afraid that if I were a member of the party, I would be going in to murder him. I actually went in one time and the chief of police of Pnohm Penh met our party--along with the foreign minister and so on--at plane when we came down and the Chief of Police walked right next to me and he said, "I'm your liason man from" and I said, "You're keeping an eye on me, I know it's allright. I'm not going to murder your boss; I have no idea of doing that." [Laughter] That is strange. And then Sihanouk made a movie--about '65, '66--in which he played the Commander of Royal Naval Intelligence foiling a great American spy, who happened to have my name and was a role played by some prince man who was visiting there and I was out to overthrow the kingdom but of course our boy hero thwarted the ugly American and won the girl, who was the daughter of the Brazilian

ambassador or something. Some French gal played the role. I've been trying to get a print of that or some way of seeing that movie--I'd love to see it, you know. It sounds great and. . . . [Laughter]

O'BRIEN: Yes, I hadn't heard about that. Well, that does hit on something, though, in regard to Southeast Asia. As I understand, in that Dap Chhuon incident, there was an Agency involvement with him, through a guy by the name of [illegible], and the Agency does seem to have a kind of free hand in some of these Southeast Asian nations. I'm thinking of the [Allen L.] Pope situation in Indonesia as well. Can you see any brakes put on them as a result of the change of administrations--how do you react to this sort of activity?

LANSDALE: Well, most of the things that they did that had political consequences of any major size at all--and certainly a thing with Dap Chhuon and also the Pope thing--are only under taken by the Agency after approval up at topside, so as far

as brakes are concerned they've had them from the beginning. However, the objectives and the intent are approved and not the means of doing it--the nuts and bolts--which are supposedly overseen by an ambassador. And when we get down to the level of a country where these things are happening, then I think much depends on the individuals: the ambassador, and the station chief, and how they get along, and again, mostly on the. . . . Well, no it isn't either; it's a fifty-fifty proposition. We have ambassadors who don't want to know or who are opposed all such things and if an order comes down to do it they very unwillingly tell the guy to go ahead, but watch it now, not too far. A station chief then, with orders to do some things will have told the ambassador he isn't going to this, but he starts in things, and he figures, that if he goes back and tells the ambassador what's happening that he's not going to get any understanding and will probably get an order prohibiting him for doing something, and won't

be able to explain, "Well, if I stop doing this, then this other thing won't work, and Washington wants us to have this happen." The ambassador will just say, "No, I don't see it that way. Don't do it." So I'm sure there are things happening that aren't told for this--for operational reasons, and again, it's a judgment of an individual on that thing. It's not a policy type of a thing from the Agency.

O'BRIEN: Yes. Do you find any--in the time that you're there in the middle fifties as well as when you go back in '60, '61, and later involvement in Vietnam--do you find differences between the embassies, between the U.S. embassy in, particularly, Pnohm Penh and Saigon?

LANSDALE: I didn't notice that. It might have existed, and I wouldn't have even known that.

O'BRIEN: Well, there's some feeling among people involved with Cambodian relations during that time, as I understand it, that somehow there's an involvement on the part of the South Vietnamese in some of the groups like the . . . .

LANSDALE: Oh, yeah. Both the South Vietnamese and the Tai were playing around with groups inside Cambodia, or with exile groups that wanted to go back in Cambodia and so on and I'm not certain that the Americans from either Thailand or South Vietnam were fully aware of what all was going on. And I'm not certain that the Americans or the Cambodian government people inside Cambodia knew what was going on, and were tending to exaggerate some of this. Things get blown up out of all proportion in this. But, just the fact that there was antipathy and it would take this form of expression among others that were going on. . . . I don't know which people would rather go in and take over and run Cambodia--the Thai's or the South Vietnamese it's about a toss up which one was down more on the Khmers than the other. And Diem used to follow the predictions of the royal fortune-teller in P nohm Penh to Sihanouk. Apparently they were spending a lot of intelligence money to find out, you know, what's

happened in each other's sessions and what he was telling the guy. Then how useful this was, mind you, I don't know.

O'BRIEN: Well, do you find--again, in passing on to the task force--and the formation of that Vietnam task force in the early part of the Kennedy administration--do you find a sensitivity on the part of the people, the political appointees, to what's going on in South Vietnam? Are you able to explain what you're telling me right now about South Vietnam to these people?

LANSDALE: Only partially. They were as bemused by the mechanics of getting decisions in Washington as they were with the problem that they were employing the mechanics to solve. It was all sort of new to them, and they wanted to do a good job, but in order to do it, they were suddenly working with these instruments, you see, that were foreign to them here. I think that the principals also in the administration were not entirely aware of the people they were dealing with in Washington. I recall, at the time, some surprise.

Rusk was violently opposed in the department

over where he was by some people, and I noticed at times that he wasn't aware that he was turning around and asking a guy who minutes before Rusk had come in to him, was among his comrades, just, "This stupid jerk," and so on, which I felt was disloyal--behind the guy's back, you know. I was always urging them to speak up in front of people and so on, and they wouldn't do it. And the same damn thing was true against some of the military against McNamara, for example. Well, the McNamaras and the Rusks and their unders, and deputy types of people, and assistant secretaries were trying to cope with people that they felt were instinctively opposing and foot dragging and so on and trying to get that working, so that to get them working on a given problem was really the thing that they were concerned with and you'd suddenly say, "Well, we're going to talk about Laos, or Vietnam, or Israel or something. Yes, yes, yes. What have you got in the paper, you know. And they were

watching see: "Well, it's just I've really done this homework" and is it gonna come up with something or not?" rather than what is the real problem here and how would I solve it if I weren't sitting in this room in this particular group and so on. So there was a. . . .

So then, working on this type of a thing which I saw very much in the task force on Vietnam--Gilpatric I know was shocked at the reactions of some of the foreign service people that came in at rank of ambassador and so on that were sort of the staff assistants on the assistant secretary and undersecretary level. They would start a meeting--in fact, I was asked to be sort of,--I forget what the title was,--executive officer or something of it and they asked me to chair the meetings. Well, I'd no sooner open it than these guys would be passionately explaining why I souldn't be sitting in the chair of the meeting, see?

O'BRIEN: Yeah.

LANSDALE: I think it shocked some of the Kennedy administration people. It suddenly revealed a

feud and so on, and I hadn't said it, and I personally didn't care that much, you know. I'd say, "Have you got all the hate out of your system now? Let's go on with the meeting, see. This of course would activate it more but I would say, "Well look, we really do have some problems here we've got to get to, and if you want I'll meet you afterwards and we can have lunch or something and you can spoil my lunch by telling me what a heel I am or something. But we've got work to do." So then, Gilpatric or somebody would tell me afterwards, "Do you think we better take you off?" "Well, yeah. If it's going to effect the work done, it's better to take me off. It's no fun for me to sit up and chair something under conditions like this, so . . .

O'BRIEN: Yeah. Were you ever approached with the job as ambassador to Vietnam?

LANSDALE: Yeah. Yeah.

O'BRIEN: Who was pushing that?

LANSDALE: I don't know. I heard about it this first Saturday after the inaugural--I think that's it. It was very early in the administration. McNamara asked me to come down to the White House and meet him there, and I thought it was to brief him on something. And I was working on a number of intelligence matters in Defense at the time and I showed up and he asked me to just wait outside and they were meeting in the Cabinet room and as I said, it was essentially an NSC group. And after a bit, they asked me to come on and they had me sit opposite the president. And he looked at me and he said, "Did Dean [Rusk] tell you, I want you to be ambassador to Vietnam?" I said, "No, he didn't mention that." Well, he hadn't at all, and there was a long, painful silence and I figured, Well, Gee, maybe he's asking me if I want to be or would I accept the job. So I finally said, Well it would be a great honor, and that was the last I ever heard of it. But, I heard all sorts of rumors that they use for Washington and things afterwards that Dean Rusk

was very much opposed to it, and opposed on the ground that I was a military man and they didn't want military people in on the situation.

O'BRIEN: Yeah.

LANSDALE: And then later I had met one of Rusk's staff officers at the time, and he was telling me that Rusk was figuring that he could get me a job some other place or a promotion or something to get me out of the way at the time-- apparently I had become a target for a lot of gossip and rumors at the time. But after that then, they asked me--Kennedy asked me pretty point blank--about Durbrow and I said, "Well, after what you just asked me and so forth, I'm a little hesitant, but you're the President and you need the truth so I'll just tell you right now, I think he's a very ill man, his judgement's impaired by his physical condition, he's a fine professional foreign service officer and could be used some place but don't keep him on in Vietnam anymore. He's sick, he's on his back a lot of the time and you need someone very alert, whether--whoever it is and pull him

out." And they got--Rusk and everything, you know--"You're off your subject, boy." But I said, "Well, Durby's an old friend of mine and I like the guy and I saw a lot of him when I was in Vietnam on this brief visit and I think it's a shame that the guy's kept on there because he was quite ill, in bad shape." And Durby never forgave me for it; it got right back to him that I had sacked him and so on because he was withdrawn after that, but this certainly didn't hurt his career at all, in any way, and even though State put him on a make-work job after that, but he held the rank of ambassador which is as high as you can get in the foreign service. And he was ill, he really was.

O'BRIEN: Well how does [Frederick E.] Nolting come into this . . .

LANSDALE: Well, Nolting came in as the apparently as the foreign services rebuttal to my going on out of there. I remember both McNamara and Gilpatric asked me about him, and I didn't know him. I said "Well, I'd just go on what I have heard from

other foreign service officers who respect him very much." So finally, Nolting was-- a meeting was arranged with Nolting and I liked him very much when I talked with him. He asked me if I would give him some briefings on Vietnam, which I did do. And when I wound up the end of that, I was asked again by McNamara, who said he was going to tell Kennedy, and I said, "Well, this looks like a very good man, and I think it's a sound appointment." I didn't want to be ambassador. Jesus. During the Eisenhower administration, they wanted to make me ambassador of the Philippines and I begged them not to. I think that's one of the world's worst jobs. You're stuck where you can't do what your job is supposed to be and I knew they were going to put me in places where I'd be up against Communist political leaders of some sort, working the other side. And of course you aren't in that position, but allegedly you are and you're going to have people running circles around you if you know it and couldn't lift a little finger to stop them. And this

isn't my idea of a good spot to be in. You just get belabored over that.

O'BRIEN: Well, did Nolting ever try to get you back to Vietnam, in an advisory position?

LANSDALE: I think so. There were a number of attempts by the Vietnamese themselves, and unfortunately, some of them were couched in terms of wanting me to come out as ambassador, by the Vietnamese. But Nolting and I had very friendly relations, and I think he had proposed that I come on out several times. But these things would usually only come to me sort of second or third hand. At one time apparently President Kennedy had said something to the JCS because suddenly my relations with the Chiefs went down to less than zero and sub-zero. I finally asked General [Curtis E.] Lemay of the Air Force, because I'm an Air Force officer, what the trouble was. And he said, "You and your ambitions to have four stars." I said, "What's this again?" Apparently Kennedy had said something to the Chiefs of, what would they think of my being given four stars and being put in charge of operations in Vietnam?

And I didn't know about it, and they took it that I was pushing myself for it. I said again, "that isn't something I'd want to do." So this was about the time that--no, maybe General [William Westmoreland] Westy was coming in about then; it was around that time.

O'BRIEN: Well, the task force really forms up the instructions for Nolting, doesn't it? . . .

LANSDALE: Yes.

O'BRIEN: . . . for the next few years. Just what kind of recommendations come out of that task force?

LANSDALE: Well, I was only in on the very original one, which was to undertake some things such as changing the specific types of things to meet a situation there. One of them was: we would get a political section that would work out better relations with the Vietnamese government, a political section in our embassy, and that the Foreign Service would go and search through their own personnel for people with some real political savvy to get in to guide, rather than control or belabor or have confrontations with the Vietnamese government

to carry out essentially political reforms, and getting some of the just criticism of the opposition considered in the governing body.

Another thing was on the police, of getting police training done so that they could cope with meeting enemy units, rather than doing urban police work. In this, I was begging them to at least get to a state constabulary level as far as American advisors were concerned, and I wasn't certain that the U.S. Army's military police could cope with it, but maybe they could get a team of them in. Then I was pointing out that there were constabulary officers and officers from other countries, including South America and the old Philippine constabulary, who knew the law-and-order conditions--quite similar to Vietnam--and bring them in if they wanted to go international. I was trying to get them to get very realistic in solving problems by changing the quality and the approach that we had.

We drew up an original draft that went to the President, out of meetings that

lasted about ten days, at which point, at Rusk's insistence, the task force went over to State and became a general, regular body there. They then proceeded to rewrite our original instructions and drafts and everything, both McNamara and Gilpatric said, coming back from the White House, "Ed, you had better not get in there." I said, "If I can help in any way, I will." They said, "Well, right for the time being, you'd better not go near that group, see." I actually didn't get in to some of their policy formulation, again in a fairly early period, on the thrust of things in Vietnam, except for some of the Defense people who were over there. I would talk to them on what was being proposed and going on, but this was sort of second and third echelon type of a thing, pulling back out of it.

But initially, I was actually trying to get a quality U.S. representation in Vietnam, and actually smaller again than it was at the time, and to pick a few key things, and to concentrate on that, and really

to get the Vietnamese coping with their own problems more effectively than they were doing.

O'BRIEN: Yeah. Well, between this time and the time of the Taylor-Rostow [W.W.] mission, are you involved in Vietnam on a kind of regular basis or . . .

LANSDALE: Uh, no. Off and on I was, but again with second- and third-echelon type of problems. I was seeing Gilpatric every day and working very closely with him, so that a lot of times, as things would come up, he would discuss them with me. But again, I was trying to explain who certain people were that were named, their backgrounds, and their qualities, and certain events and places, and going to maps with him and describing terrain, and so on, and what the situation really meant that was making the problem. So I was fairly well out of it.

As a matter of fact, I was working with some visiting Burmese on their concepts of defense of a country, and they they brought me in with the Israeli who had had a mission helping them with their defense problems in Burma. And the Israeli then had then turned around to their defense

minister and some of the others and invited me to look at their defense system in Israel. I was quite enthusiastic about going and had everything arranged and was to leave on a Saturday, when about on a Wednesday or Thursday I was asked to go to Vietnam with the other mission and stuff and unfortunately had to cancel out everything and never got in to see what I wanted to see there.

O'BRIEN: Well you end up working on border --actually, the seating of the border then, don't you on the Taylor-Rostow thing?

LANSDALE: Yes. Yes.

O'BRIEN: What about that preoccupation? Where does that idea come from--is that Rostow's?

LANSDALE: Well, Taylor was the one that charged me with it. Taylor said, "Well you folks"--this is a flight which started--Will each of you write down some of the things you think we should look into and what you might like to look into." So I gave him a list of about twenty things I'd like to look into--none of them being this of course.

I suggested some other subjects for other people on the thing and gave it to him. He called me back and said that it was a very interesting list I had given him, and would I please work on building a defense on the border. And I said, "What sort of a defense?" He said, "Well, a system of fortifications or a wire like the Iron Curtain in Europe." I said, "Good God, you aren't going to do that, are you?" And he said, "Well, look into it." So that was supposedly all I was to do, and of course, I got called in on other things immediately.

But I wasn't even invited along to go in and see Diem with him. I said, "Look, these are old friends of mine. If you'd like, why I'll do anything I can. You can hit them high, and I'll hit them low if you want. We can get some things done that way." He said, "Well, you aren't on our protocol list, so you don't attend any of these calls on the President."

We landed in Saigon, and the people from the presidency were there and met us. Taylor and Rostow were over talking with reporters who were interviewing

them plane side, and these people from the presidency said, "President Diem wants you to come to dinner tonight" and I said, "Well, I better check on my boss on this." Taylor was busy, but I grabbed Rostow who wasn't talking at the moment and told him and he said, "Go ahead." So I said, "Well I wasn't even on the protocol and everything. I don't care about going up to these protocol meetings anyhow but I went in and saw Diem whose question was, "What's this mission doing here? What are you all up to?" I said, "Why don't you wait and they'll be in here to have a meeting with you tomorrow and you'll find out." And then it became very personal. We just started talking over his two old friends with him, and I had dinner with him. And he brought his nephew in to join us--Nhu's boy, oldest boy--who had a new toy missile, like a rocket with a launcher and I was trying to explain to this youngster who was squatting on the floor next to his uncle--the President who was busily eating dinner--you don't point at him--I didn't know how big a spring this

thing had on it, whether it would take his head off or not. [Laughter] I told him to shoot it up into the ventilating fan in the ceiling. We spent dinner actually, taking parachutes and things out of the ventilating fans and the kid and I were climbing up a ladder to get these things out of the thing in the palace. This was very different from an official protocol meeting.

O'BRIEN: Yeah. How is Diem at that point?

LANSDALE: He was a very changed man. It was the first time in our talks with each other. . . . When I met him at the palace that night, his brother Nhu came in for the first time and sat next to him and when I asked Diem a question, his brother would answer it and I'd have to tell him I wasn't asking him the question; I was asking his brother. A very strange relationship at the time and I found that he was a talker--Diem was--and he was very clear and concise in his statements and had too big a grasp of details in whatever subject he was talking about. It'd go on for hours--details on it which fascinated

me but used to bore other people. But he did know his country, and its history, which he would give at the drop of a hat. This evening in '61, seeing him, he was very hesitant in his talk and hadn't--it was something physical as well as a mental hazard or something, I felt.

O'BRIEN: Any evidence of ~~Did he go into~~ that later?

LANSDALE: No. There was a--mentally, people were telling me that his brother had taken over in the year following. ~~this~~ Just a dominance on the thing. But this was a man that wasn't as sure of himself as he had been when I had seen him less than a year before. And there had been one assassination attempt only, but the big one had taken place before I saw him in January or December of '60--the attack on the palace and so on. So it hadn't been an outside, physical happening like that that had caused the change.

O'BRIEN: Was he a spiritualist at all?

LANSDALE: No, no. He wasn't superstitious. He was a very rational sort of a person--pragmatic.

O'BRIEN: Well when you get back, you talk to President Kennedy and Robert Kennedy and John McCone as I understand, in a rather private meeting. What happened here?

LANSDALE: Well this was when I came back, I met the President. I went in with Taylor and Rostow--all of us did who were out on the mission--and he thanked us all very much and as we were he asked me to stay behind and talk to him and that was when he asked me to perform this other service for him which was initially to think about it and if I came up with some ideas, why to put them down, er--briefly--on paper and give them to him. And I said, "Well, do you want to forget about Vietnam for the time being because I haven't written my report yet about Vietnam." He said, "Yes, this other takes priority over it so I didn't even finish writing my reports on what I had seen in Vietnam at the time. I went immediately into this other work.

O'BRIEN: Well about that time, there's at least some thinking in terms of memos that are going to the President about the only way to save

is with a rather substantial committment of U.S. troops. Is that . . .

LANSDALE: Yes, there was some. Now where. . . . Hmm, there was some and I can't remember just where it was coming from. This was one of the things that Diem asked me when I saw him. He asked me if he should ask for U.S. troops and I said, "Do you need them?" He said, I asked you a question," and I said, "Well, I'm asking you a very legitimate question on this thing and I said,"Are you ready to admit that you have so lost control of your situation that you can't cope with it here?" And I said, "You'd have to do that before you ever turn around and ask for American troops in here." And he said, "No, we can still handle things and you've answered my question, so apparently he didn't ask. There have been some conversations going on I'm sure with some of the Americans before that would be my guess on this thing because he didn't say, "What do you think of . . . Is there anything should I ask?" which was sort of like somebody had recommended this at some point and I

don't think it would have been completely in the Vietnamese context.

O'BRIEN: Yeah, do you get any of this thinking when you get back? Any contingency planning or thinking about the building of troop levels to a more substantial level--maybe linked with the settling of the Laotian question first?

LANSDALE: There might have been, and I might have known some of it. I can't recall now of any, it's someplace in the back of my head there were some things like that going on. I turned around, just took time off completely from other things and concentrated on this other problem for a time afterwards. Actually, through December of that year, I was sort of holed up and working on some things. My staff would get in and out of some of these other things and I used to shove them in to take my place in meetings and so on, and I can only then just get very quick briefings on them, but they were essentially supporting whatever McNamara and Gilpatric were doing, so I'd just have them go in and report directly and work with them directly.

O'BRIEN: Yeah. Who were the people on your staff at that point?

LANSDALE: Well, let's see? One of them was Sam Wilson, whose now a brigadier general in the Army. Jack Bowles was a Navy Captain who went down to serve with the JCS afterwards and is now with Standard Oil and working out of Singapore. And I had five or six people like that, but those were my two principle ones.

O'BRIEN: Well this is about ready to run out, and we've covered a